

HALLOWEEN MASKS AND DEINDIVIDUATION

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Diener, Fraser, Beaman, and Kelem (1976) examined the effects of anonymity, group presence, and assignment of responsibility on stealing by trick-or-treating children. To create a nonanonymous condition, the experimenter identified each child and address. In the anonymous cells, the costumed children were not identified. They found significantly more stealing when the children remained anonymous. The results were interpreted as support for Zimbardo's (1969) suggestion that anonymity leads to deindividuation which lowers behavioral restraints. The present study was designed to examine a costume manipulation of anonymity (mask vs no mask). In light of Zimbardo's specification of anonymity as an antecedent of deindividuation and the Diener, *et al.* finding, it was predicted that children wearing masks would violate candy rules more often than children not wearing masks.

In accord with the Diener, *et al.* (1976) procedure, children who were not accompanied by an adult were greeted by a female experimenter who explained that each child was allowed to take two candies from a bowl of individually wrapped candies. The experimenter answered questions, indicated she had to return to her work and exited. An unseen observer recorded whether or not each child was wearing a mask and how many candies the child took. Of the 58 unaccompanied children who came to the three homes participating in this study, 31 (53%) took more than two candies. Thirty-nine children wore masks and 24 of them (62%) violated the rule. Nineteen children did not wear masks and only seven of them (37%) were violaters. A chi-square test suggested a tendency for masked children to violate more often than nonmasked children ($\chi^2 = 3.14, p < .10$). The sex of the children did not produce a statistically significant effect. While no formal attempt was made to estimate the children's ages, each of the six experimenters reported that the masked and unmasked groups did not appear to differ in terms of age, the approximate range being 9 to 13 yr. It appears that costume masks can serve to elicit a state of deindividuation and lead to lowered restraints on behavior of young children.

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